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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000337

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR BORDER
SECURITY

REF: BEIRUT 314

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)

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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a 3/2 meeting, the Border Security sub-group, a working-level unit of the larger International Security Assistance Donors Group that meets monthly in Beirut, discussed the current status of Lebanon's border security effort. Although the Siniora government wants the German-led Northern Border Pilot program to ramp up as soon as possible, there is confusion over who will assist Lebanon's security services on the remainder of the Lebanese-Syrian frontier. Siniora has designated the LAF as the lead unit among Lebanon's security services regarding the pilot program, which suits the Germans. The operational plan is reportedly finished, except for communications (due to interoperability questions) and will shortly be shared with those donor nations who have expressed an interest in assisting the program. Meanwhile, the UN/DPKO office in New York sent in a team to update last fall's DPKO assessment report, which encompassed the entire Lebanese-Syrian border. Their visit last week to the northern border area, however, has apparently confused the LAF, who thought that project would be a strictly German-led effort. The inclusion of two UNIFIL officers in the DPKO team further perplexed the LAF. Finally, despite earlier reports to the contrary, the EU is now expressing interest in taking over the northern pilot program once its initial six-month phase is completed. End summary.

¶2. (C) Embassy Beirut representatives have participated in a series of informal international security assistance donor meetings over the past five months at both core group and sub-group levels. Although the larger group has proved useful for sharing overall developments (e.g. status of UNIFIL's current operations), the sub-group meetings have proved a better forum for candid discussion of planned initiatives and emerging challenges.

¶3. (C) According to LtCol Stephan Helmschrott, the German representative at the March 2 Border Security sub-group meeting, Prime Minister Siniora has given Germany's ambassador to Lebanon clear authorization to proceed with the Northern Border Pilot project. Siniora informed the German

ambassador that he has directed the LAF to take the lead in the multi-service effort (LAF, ISF, Surete General, Customs).

The operational director of the project for the LAF will be Brigadier General Mustafa Majzoub, the army's northern commander. The German side of the effort will be headed by Brigadier General Detlef Karioth, German Federal Police, who has been working on the project since its inception last fall. Gen. Majzoub has already set aside billeting and work spaces for the anticipated group of German advisors in the garrison town of Aandqet, which is located close to the center of the operational area.

A FEW CROSSED WIRES

14. (C) Although the Northern Border Pilot project appears to be well organized in the actual operating area, the lines of authority become more tangled as they lead back to Beirut.

Minister of Defense Elias Murr has recently appointed Major General Said Eid, Secretary of the Higher Defense Council, and Brigadier General George Hisham, Deputy Chief of Staff for Planning, to "coordinate" international donors to the project, even though the Germans had intended to carry out that function on their own -- preferably through the International Security Assistance Donors Group. General Karioth, in particular, had hoped the LAF would concentrate on coordinating Lebanon's contribution to the effort, most importantly, the expeditious allocation of personnel and facilities for the project. General Karioth is planning to meet with General Eid to work this out, because he fears that if equipment and training needs for this project become embroiled in politics at LAF Headquarters, it could introduce further unacceptable delays in executing the project.

15. (C) Karioth told the sub-group that the equipment and training requirements list for the pilot project is nearly

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complete (a communications package still needs to be determined, but the German Federal Police are sending a communications expert to work with General Majzoub next week). Once he settles on the communications package, he wants to begin the equipment acquisition and training process. Karioth said he fully appreciates the need to get the correct mix of equipment (i.e., interoperable and suitable to LAF maintenance capabilities) at the beginning of the project, to avoid unnecessary and expensive changes later on when the border effort is extended to the rest of Lebanon's border with Syria. But he firmly believes this can be done at the pilot project level. If possible, he wants to avoid yet another equipment assessment, especially if it involves the traditionally slow LAF Headquarters decision process.

16. (C) In a related matter, the UK's representative to the sub-group meeting reported that two officers representing the European Union's Security Council visited Lebanon last week to evaluate the "operational requirements" of the Northern Border Pilot project. The EU is apparently "very interested" in taking over the project once it has completed its initial phase. The UK, German, and Danish representatives indicated this was preferable to the only other alternative -- UN sponsorship. According to the German representative, PM Siniora has also expressed a preference for an EU partnership in later phases of the project, rather than the UN. (Note: This development is at odds with recent reporting that the EU has steadfastly refused to release available funds for the initial phase of the pilot project. End note.)

UN/DPKO VISIT TO LEBANON

17. (C) In September 2006, at the request of Lebanon's Ministry of Defense, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations sent an assessment team to evaluate the country's ports, airport, and land borders. Ten days ago, a follow-up

team arrived to update the original report and evaluate the progress made by the GOL in securing its borders. The team reportedly visited all portions of the Lebanese border: the Blue Line, as well as Lebanon's eastern and northern borders with Syria. Although the core of the team comprised staff from UN/DPKO headquarters, at least two UNIFIL personnel accompanied the team on its field investigations, including its visit to the north.

18. (C) The unexpected presence of UNIFIL personnel in the northern border area reportedly resulted in some consternation among LAF leadership, in that it was felt that UNIFIL may be operating out of its area of responsibility. DPKO officers apparently assured their LAF counterparts that since UNIFIL's presence on the team was unofficial and the visit was merely for assessment purposes, there was no intent to imply a possible expansion of UNIFIL's mission at this time.

COMMENT

19. (C) The mix of international players involved in Lebanon's security assistance effort (UNIFIL, EU, UN/DPKO, international donors, including a number of GCC states who do not share information with other donors) may be beginning to overtax the GOL's ability to coordinate and effectively absorb the assistance. The aforementioned LAF Major General Said Eid is supposed to be heading up an International Security Assistance Coordination Panel to work with various international participants, as well as coordinate Lebanon's disparate security services, in the important tasks of modernization and securing the country's land and sea borders. But as of this date, the panel has not met and may not be established. The informal International Security Assistance Donors Group could possibly fulfill at least part of this function, but what is needed is that the LAF and ISF step up and assume their "planning and policy" responsibilities. Getting any security project implemented under the present system, including the Northern Border pilot project, is both a difficult and lengthy process. End comment.
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